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DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION DIRECTORATE
DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE COMMITTEE

EVALUATING DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

12 Lessons from the OECD DAC

In accordance with the schedule and process for the development of further 12 Lessons publications by DCD (DCD/DIR(2011)9), this document has been approved by the DAC's designated editorial board and is submitted to the DAC for APPROVAL under the written procedure.

Additional information on DAC member experiences was added to Lessons 3 and 10.This document is now considered as APPROVED and FINAL.

It will be prepared for publication in the 12 Lessons from peer reviews series in accordance with the format agreed with the editorial board and will be launched on the occasion of the DAC Evaluation Network's 30th Anniversary celebration, at the OECD Conference Centre on 18 June 2013. The publication will be disseminated through a range of channels, including via DAC delegates, subsidiary bodies, DCD meetings and events and web-based media.

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Evaluating Development Activities

Twelve lessons from the OECD DAC

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development is a unique forum where the governments of 34 democracies work together to address the economic, social and environmental challenges of globalisation. The OECD is also at the forefront of efforts to understand and to help governments respond to new developments and concerns, such as corporate governance, the information economy and the challenges of an ageing population. The Organisation provides a setting where governments can compare policy experiences, seek answers to common problems, identify good practice and work to co-ordinate domestic and international policies.

In order to achieve its aims the OECD has a number of specialised committees. One of these is the Development Assistance Committee (DAC), whose members have agreed to secure an expansion of aggregate volume of resources made available to developing countries and to improve their effectiveness. To this end, members periodically review together both the amount and the nature of their contributions to aid programmes, bilateral and multilateral, and consult each other on all other relevant aspects of their development assistance policies.

The members of the Development Assistance Committee are: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union.

Preface

The 12 Lessons series pulls together knowledge on good practice in development co-operation from the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), drawing in particular on the findings of the DAC's peer reviews. Peer reviews of DAC members are based on the dual principles of peer pressure and peer learning. The reviews are the only international process regularly to examine key bilateral development co-operation systems and offer constructive commentary for their reform. In doing so, peer reviews constitute a yardstick against which the DAC can measure the influence – or lack of it – of its good practice principles on members' behaviour, both in the field and at headquarters. The ultimate aims of DAC peer reviews are to:

1. Help improve the quality and quantity of development assistance.

2. Provide credible analyses based on common principles that can be used by both OECD countries and the wider international community.

3. Enable DAC members to share experiences, identify good practices and improve co-ordination.

Evaluating development co-operation activities is one of the areas where the DAC's influence on policy and practice can most readily be observed. Having an evaluation system that is well-established is one of the conditions of becoming a member of the DAC. Each peer review examines the set-up and management of the evaluation function, using the norms and standards developed by the DAC's Network on Development Evaluation. The Network is one of the longest standing subsidiary bodies of the DAC and evaluation is now used extensively by donors, partner governments and implementing agencies.

The OECD DAC's "Principles for Evaluation of Development Assistance" (OECD, 1991) are at the heart of the DAC's approach to evaluation. The principles focus on the management of the evaluation function. The *Quality Standards for Development Evaluation,* approved in 2010, compliment these principles with guidance on the evaluation process and report. These provide the standards on which member countries are assessed in the DAC peer reviews. Shared standards also contribute to collaboration, in line with the commitments to improve co-ordination and make aid more effective. Periodic reviews look at how evaluation systems are evolving and examine current issues in member agencies; see for instance the most recent review *Evaluation in Development Agencies* (OECD, 2010a).

This booklet outlines 12 important lessons on development evaluation, drawing on experiences of the members of the Network on Development Evaluation and the findings of DAC peer reviews from 2009 to 2012 (see References for complete list). Each section explains the importance of the lesson for development co-operation agencies and provides examples. Lessons are grouped under the following headings: the strategic framework, delivering effective evaluation and building a culture of learning.

This publication was written by Megan G. Kennedy-Chouane, Policy Analyst, with Hans Lundgren, Head of the Evaluation Unit, of the OECD Development Co-operation Directorate's Review, Evaluation & Engagement Division. Valuable comments and feedback were provided by the members of the DAC Network on Development Evaluation. Australia, Canada, Japan, Norway and Poland provided oversight as members of the DAC editorial board and Ida McDonnell managed the process for the OECD. The 12 Lessons series, covering a range of current issues and targeted at development policy professionals, has been developed under the direction and guidance of Karen Jorgensen, Head of the Review, Engagement and Evaluation Division of the OECD's Development Co-operation Directorate.

Introduction

By Erik Solheim, Chair of the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD

Evaluation is at the heart of current efforts to make development co-operation more effective at supporting economic growth and reducing poverty. Questions about whether or not "aid works" have pre-occupied the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) since the group's early days. Today, in the face of fiscal retrenchment and mounting aid scepticism, we face even more pressure to demonstrate the results of development activities. Donor and partner governments alike need more credible, timely evidence about their performance. While acknowledging that aid alone cannot drive development, we must strive to better understand how different types of development co-operation and finance, including official development assistance (ODA), fit together to improve outcomes for poor people around the world. Evaluation has an invaluable role to play in providing answers to these questions.

Lessons from evaluation studies have shaped our current approach to development. For example, evaluators in Ethiopia found that nutrition programmes were targeting the wrong children with supplements – reaching kids that were either too old to benefit or were not actually malnourished. These evaluation findings resulted in significant changes to the way the programmes were being implemented and ultimately improved health outcomes in the beneficiary communities. Evaluations of infrastructure projects have identified unintended impacts, such as significant increases in the spread of HIV/AIDS in communities along new paved roads, changing the way potential health risks are accounted for during the design phase of new projects.

The field of evaluation continues to evolve – both reflecting and influencing trends in development thinking. New methodologies and ways of working are being developed to respond to two key pressures: understanding development impacts and improving mutual accountability. While the tools and approaches used in evaluative research are sometimes hotly debated, the DAC has learned that evaluation is best used flexibly. The methods for evaluating should be based on what is most useful for answering the questions at hand. An evaluation is effective when it makes a real difference by delivering credible evidence on what works and why to feed into policies and programme decisions. These 12 Lessons will help evaluations achieve this goal. The lessons will be of particular interest to countries working to professionalise their development programmes, including partners beyond the DAC.

We owe it to ourselves, to our taxpayers and, most importantly, to the people in developing countries whom development co-operation is meant to help, to make sure our policies and programmes achieve development results. This booklet provides sound advice on how evaluation can contribute to this end.

Erik Solheim
Chair of the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD

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THE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR LEARNING & ACCOUNTABILITY

Lesson 1: Base development policy decisions on evidence

WHAT: Policy makers and senior management should look to evaluation for credible, independent analysis and recommendations to inform their decision making processes. Evaluation should help an organisation understand if it is working effectively and efficiently towards its goals, and identify what results it is achieving and how. Managers approving disbursement of funds, designing programmes and setting strategic direction for the agency should base their decisions on a clear understanding of which interventions are most likely to achieve the desired results in a particular context. Where strong evidence is not available, plans to generate better understanding should be built in from the outset (see Lesson 5). Strategic planning, including sector approaches or country strategies, should also draw on evaluation findings.

WHY: Evaluation can provide much needed information for political leaders to credibly say that they know how to achieve success and manage risks. However, policy decisions are too often driven by routine (we have always approached it this away), assumptions (this worked in the capital city, it will work in the rural areas, too) or hunches (looks like more school buildings would improve education outcomes) about what might work, rather than by proven, strategies for solving a particular problem in a given context. With a stronger evidence-base, senior policy makers can stand on more solid ground to defend their development co-operation programmes to sceptics. Moreover, strong evidence of how an organisation is contributing to development results can help justify spending in times of fiscal retrenchment – as well as when funding for aid is increasing. Evidence-driven decisions are less likely to be dictated by political interest and can thus insulate the aid programme from changes in government or personnel.

Aid managers need to understand both their organisation's successes and its failures in order to take better decisions. While monitoring, performance management and results reporting systems can provide some information, in-depth evaluation is needed to explain *how* results are achieved.

HOW: An evidence-based approach to managing development co-operation requires consistent demand for top quality evidence, as well as arrangements for supplying relevant lessons when and where they are needed. Creating an evidence-based organisation is as much about politics and culture as it is about regulations or institutional set-up. Evidence-based policy making requires commitment and buy-in from the top levels of the agency or Ministry to ensure there is a serious focus on understanding what works and why and being accountable for results. Policy makers, managers and staff must be willing to build up the necessary systems to become a knowledge-based organisation. Regular interaction between evaluation units and agency management helps create a productive dialogue and maintain interest in evaluation findings.

DAC member experiences*

In the **United States, Australia** and the **United Kingdom**, senior leadership in the aid administration have issued strong political statements underlining their commitment to base decisions on sound evidence and hold development agencies accountable for the results of their activities. This often involves tying funding decisions to a clear, evidence-based justification for the programme design. In **Denmark**, policy makers in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs included an explicit commitment to "strengthen documentation, evaluation and effective communication of results" in their new 2012 development co-operation strategy (Denmark Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2012) and also drew on the findings of evaluations to elaborate their new strategies for supporting human rights and democracy.

In **Canada** and **Spain,** the head of evaluation plays an advisory role on senior decision-making committees, so that he or she can feed evidence into government decision-making processes and documents, for example submissions to the Treasury or memoranda to the Cabinet or Parliament. **The Netherlands'** independent evaluation office reports directly to parliament, creating a strong incentive for senior management to pay attention to evaluation findings. In 2012, **Ireland** planned country-level evaluation work in Ethiopia and Swaziland to correspond with visits of senior Irish Aid officials to each country, providing an excellent opportunity to inform the dialogue with evaluative evidence. In **Luxembourg,** the Minister's annual declaration to parliament on development co-operation uses evaluation findings. Involving evaluation departments in meetings on programming (e.g. with country teams or operational units) can provide opportunities for knowledge sharing, as is done in **Norway** and in many of the multilateral banks.

Lesson 2: Make learning part of the culture of development co-operation

WHAT: Organisations that have a strong culture of learning tend to have greater impact, be more adaptable and less prone to failure − the same is true in development. Development agencies that adopt an institutional attitude that encourages critical thinking and a willingness to adapt and improve continuously will be more effective at achieving their goals. Policy makers and senior managers should strive to create an organisational culture that demands good evidence about development results. Such a culture of learning encourages innovation and risk taking, recognising that the only real failure is the one we fail to learn from.

A learning culture is not just about doing evaluation, but about adopting evaluative thinking in all aspects of development co-operation. This involves being results-oriented and striving to make decisions based on the best available evidence − as well as identifying and working to fill evidence gaps. It also involves questioning assumptions and being open to critical analysis of what is working or not working in a particular context and why. The heart of a learning culture is a relentless drive to improve outcomes.

WHY: Development is a complex business and many areas are still riddled with knowledge gaps. In many cases it is not entirely clear which particular approach will work best. Careful experimentation is required to figure out what approaches are working and why, and what contextual factors are critical to achieving desired outcomes. Evaluation is a key link in this learning chain.

A learning culture can create systems that encourage staff and management to flag, investigate and learn from success or failure. If staff, management and policy makers are not willing to examine assumptions or change course, evaluation findings and recommendations will go unheeded and mistakes will be repeated. A failure to understand what is being achieved (or not) can lead to ineffective, miss-targeted or poorly implemented assistance, which is not only a waste of money, but also costly in terms of lost lives and livelihoods for those who are meant to benefit from aid − people around the world suffering from poverty and exclusion.

HOW: A culture of continuous learning and improvement requires institutional and personal incentives to use and learn from evaluation, research and information on performance. Building up an organisational culture that encourages learning requires more than just changing regulations and policies. It must include motivating staff, nurturing leaders and champions and developing a vision for the agency or Ministry that can inspire and drive forward efforts to improve results. Managers must make taking calculated risks acceptable. They should encourage staff to reflect critically on their experiences to identify lessons they can apply in the future. The conclusions of evaluations are not always positive – sometimes they will reveal ineffective programmes or unintended harm caused by development activities. Leaders need to understand that embracing an evaluative approach entails a certain amount of risk to both them as individuals responsible for aid expenditures, and to the credibility of the development co-operation programme as a whole. Policy makers should accept that not all risks can be avoided and be prepared to manage these risks in a productive manner.

Drawing from the experience of **Belgium** (Kliest *et al.*, 2010), key steps for strengthening learning are:

- integrating evaluation with policy-making and strategic planning at all levels of the organisation,

- using evaluation as an important instrument for knowledge management,

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- setting a positive "tone from the top" where senior managers show clear support for learning and accept both positive and negative findings from evaluations,

- creating incentives and systems to ensure that learning (including taking lessons from evaluations done by others) becomes part of normal daily business in the organisation.

DAC member experiences

The **United States** Millennium Challenge Corporation and the **European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)** require programme design teams (or managers) to clearly explain their plans for evaluation and the evidence behind each programme proposal, creating an incentive for all staff to think about and plan for learning. Other countries have used workshops, seminars, informal lunchtime or after work discussions of evaluation findings or staff orientation/training, to encourage open debate and support learning.

As part of its efforts to improve the dissemination and use of evaluation knowledge both within and outside the agency, **Canada's CIDA** produced a new report entitled "CIDA Learns: Lessons from Evaluations" in 2013, presenting key lessons distilled from a sample of evaluation reports organised around different themes. **Portugal** is working to build a culture of evaluation across the Portuguese development co-operation system by encouraging all staff, including those in line ministries, to see evaluation as a positive and normal part of programme management.

Finland holds an annual Evaluation Day with training on evaluation for staff throughout the Foreign Ministry to garner interest and increase uptake of findings. Each year the **Norwegian Government Agency for Financial Management** awards a prize to the government institution that has best demonstrated the efficient use of government resources, to encourage learning. In 2011, the prize was awarded to the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) for their use of evaluation. NORAD is now experimenting with a similar prize within the Foreign Ministry to create incentives for using evaluation in development co-operation.

Box 1: Focus on learning and results in UKAID

With the arrival of a new government in the **United Kingdom** in 2011, several changes were implemented in development co-operation to put more emphasis on evaluating the impacts of U.K. aid and encouraging an organisation-wide focus on learning. This involved the creation of an independent committee on development impact and strengthening evaluation capacities across the Department for International Development (DFID), including in country teams. Support came from the highest political levels, with the UK Secretary of State for International Development making results reporting and accountability key priorities. A new process of certification was set up for staff, to allow each employee to measure and improve their competencies in the area of evaluation. Staff from throughout the organisation, including those working in country offices, were encouraged to seek certification. Prior to approval, country programmes also have to create a business case outlining the assumptions, logic and evidence behind their programme design.

Source: York (2012)

Lesson 3: Define a clear role for evaluation

WHAT: Good development evaluation starts with clearly defining the contribution it makes to achieving agency objectives and development goals. The role of evaluation is to provide credible, independent evidence about the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of development activities. This information is used to support learning, test theories about how development results can be achieved, strengthen programme design and management, and inform decision makers. Evaluation should meet development policy makers' needs for good evidence (Lesson 1) and help staff and management design better programmes and strategies. Evaluation also contributes to making funding decisions; allocations can be contingent on a programme or policy demonstrating it can achieve success. Evaluation is part of holding governments and development partners accountable for results.

WHY: A strong evaluation policy will lay the ground for building a learning culture (Lesson 2) and support the use of evidence in decision making. The quality of, interest in, and use of evaluation will all be strengthened if decision makers, management, staff and partners understand the role evaluation plays in development co-operation operations. Without this understanding, stakeholders risk viewing evaluation negatively as a burden that gets in the way of their work − rather than as a valuable support function. An evaluation policy can also clarify roles and responsibilities within the institution and describe linkages to other functions, such as audit, research and performance monitoring.

A strong evaluation policy also sends a signal that the development agency is committed to achieving results and being transparent. Signalling a concerted effort to understand the results of development assistance and learn from experience can help reassure the public that money is being spent wisely.

HOW: It is helpful to set out the role of evaluation in a formal policy (or other government directive), either as a specific evaluation policy or as part of the overall development co-operation policy. A 2010 review of DAC members found that all DAC members have a public mandate defining evaluation's role and core operating procedures (OECD, 2010a). Seventy-percent have a single policy document on evaluation. Most policies set up an independent central evaluation unit charged with thematic and country-level evaluations. These central units also assess how effective the agency or Ministry is as a whole and its contribution to development results. Project-level evaluations are largely decentralised and managed by operational units.

No matter how the agency decides to set up the evaluation function, it should be credible and transparent. The policy should set the stage for an evaluation process that is reliable and which stakeholders feel they can trust. Credibility depends on the expertise of the evaluators and the degree of independence of the process, and requires that evaluations should report successes as well as failures. A transparent, independent process helps avoid conflicts of interest which could arise if policy makers and managers were solely responsible for evaluating their own activities.

The evaluation policy should be linked to other relevant policies and legislation, providing an appropriate institutional framework. The DAC *Principles for Evaluation of Development Assistance* (OECD, 1991) outlines the key elements that should be included in an evaluation policy. Evaluation policies should describe what types of programmes and policies will be evaluated, how often, and by whom and create incentives for supporting country-led evaluation (Lesson 9) and co-ordinating evaluation work with other development actors (Lesson 8).

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DAC member experiences

The evaluation policies in **Switzerland, Australia** and **Austria** distinguish between different kinds of evaluations, set out the mandate for the central evaluation unit and describe the role of evaluation in the development agency. **Denmark's** comprehensive evaluation policy (updated in 2012) defines the purpose of evaluation and positions the Evaluation Department as an independent, specialised unit in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Evaluation policies play an important role in ensuring that the evaluation process is protected from untoward interference. To strengthen independence and credibility, **Sweden**, the **United Kingdom** and **Germany**, have experimented with creating independent evaluation bodies outside of the development agency. Many agencies assure independence by reporting directly to Parliament, senior management or an oversight or policy committee (or in the case of multilateral institutions, to the board). The evaluation units in **Italy** and **Portugal** report directly to the Director-General. In **Australia**, the work of the Office of Development Effectiveness is overseen by an Independent Evaluation Committee consisting of three external members (including the Chair) and one internal representative. In **Ireland**, the Department of Foreign Affairs Audit Committee provides an independent perspective on Irish Aid's audit and evaluation functions and reviews the annual evaluation work plan. The committee includes six independent members (four from the private sector and two retired civil servants) and reports to the Secretary General of the Department. Its annual reports are made available publicly. In **Germany**, and elsewhere, the Evaluation Department in BMZ works in close collaboration with operational departments to identify topics of interest for evaluation (Lesson 6), but the director of evaluation takes the final decision on what to evaluate. This helps to ensure that evaluations are client-oriented, whilst retaining independence and credibility.

DELIVERING EVALUATIONS EFFECTIVELY

Lesson 4: Match ambitions with adequate resources

WHAT: To produce and use credible evaluation evidence aid agencies need to have adequate human and financial resources. This includes creating dedicated evaluation capacities for both producing and using evaluation, having evaluation competence in operational and management units, and funding for commissioning studies, data collection, knowledge management and dissemination of lessons. Human resources are just as necessary as funding. Evaluation staff must be professional and suitably qualified to use appropriate methods (Lesson 7) to examine the activities and results of their organisation, and have skills to manage the evaluation process efficiently.

WHY: If a development agency is serious about doing top quality development co-operation, it must invest accordingly. The lack of proper resourcing can have damaging effects not only on evaluation units, but on the broader culture of learning and the effectiveness of the agency overall. Evaluations can help save money by increasing efficiency and impact; funding should therefore be understood in terms of benefits as well as costs (see also Lesson 12).

New demands on evaluation units – especially more rigorous impact evaluations, working in a more collaborative way with country partners, and synthesising findings to report on aggregate development results – have major implications for resources. DAC members have reported that the lack of resources (especially human) is a key barrier affecting the quality of evaluation reports and preventing closer collaboration – particularly with partner countries (OECD, 2010a).

HOW: Project or programme level evaluations can be funded by allocating a portion of programme budgets to evaluation. There has been considerable debate about what percentage of funds is required to ensure adequate monitoring and evaluation at the programme level. Some organisations have fixed 1% or 3% as a rough guide. Funds are also needed for strategic evaluation and analysis of agency effectiveness. These figures are somewhat arbitrary – what matters most is that adequate resources are provided for evaluation to meet the relevant strategic aims of the organisation. Procurement procedures may need to be reviewed to ensure that they enable efficient financing of evaluations to meet strategic objectives, for example, by making it possible to hire external experts or pool funds for joint evaluations.

Approaches to ensure adequate funding include ring fencing funding for a central evaluation unit, as done in many of the multilateral development banks. At the strategic level, the central evaluation unit of the average DAC member country has a budget of USD 2.4 million, which represents an average of 0.16% of the ODA these units are charged with evaluating (OECD, 2010a). Evaluation units with more staff and bigger budgets do not necessarily produce more evaluations per year – as the cost and human resources required for any given evaluation will depend on the scope, purpose, data requirements, and methods. The average DAC member produces one to two major strategic evaluations per year per central evaluation unit staff (ibid). Some evaluation units carry out their own studies (requiring more resources in-house) while others contract evaluations to external consultants. Drawing on external capacities in research institutions, universities or private companies can help fill gaps in in-house expertise. Using data, research and evaluations completed by others can also help reduce direct costs.

DAC member experiences

To strengthen the pool of human resources for evaluation, several DAC members have created a help-desk function (housed either in a central evaluation unit or subcontracted to an external evaluation expert). The **United States** created a web-based learning tool to help improve staff skills in monitoring and evaluation. Efforts are underway in the **United Kingdom** to improve staff capacity through an accreditation process, which encourages all staff to build up professional competencies in evaluation. In 2011, the Evaluation Division in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of **Japan** recruited an external evaluation expert to help disseminate professional expertise within the organisation. **New Zealand** has also set up a professional development framework for staff's monitoring and evaluation skills. Many donors also fund training programmes in development evaluation to help build up capacities both within the agency and among external consultants.

Lesson 5: Strengthen programme design and management systems

WHAT: Evaluation is not a standalone function. It relies on management systems to provide details on the intervention being evaluated, information on the context in which it is implemented and data on key indicators. In order to be evaluated effectively, interventions must be able to demonstrate in measurable terms the results they intend to deliver. Programme design, monitoring, performance and knowledge management systems compliment evaluation and are prerequisites for high quality, efficient evaluation.

WHY: Well-designed and effectively monitored programmes will increase the likelihood that aid has the desired impacts while also making evaluation easier and cheaper. An organisation's capacity to manage for results depends on having programmes that have clearly defined intended results and a basic understanding of the factors affecting how those results are achieved. Too many projects and programmes cannot be evaluated credibly because of the way they were designed or implemented. For example, many interventions are ill-conceived and their goals not well articulated; risks are not properly identified and assessed; intervention theories are too general; appropriate indicators are not clearly defined; baseline data are missing; there is no representative sampling; or it is not clear whether the activities were implemented as intended. The result of such weaknesses in programme design and implementation is that evaluation studies cannot report sufficiently on results at the level of outcomes or impact. When an evaluation is commissioned, additional time and expense may be incurred to fill in gaps.

HOW: A number of agencies have instituted a systematic process to review programmes at the design phase to make sure they have well defined objectives and a clear programme logic, and to check that they can readily be monitored and evaluated. These criteria are then taken into account during the programme approval process.

DAC member experiences

New Zealand has a system to help staff assess and document how each activity is performing or has performed, what actions are necessary and what lessons can be learned. **The Netherlands** screens all programmes with expenditures over EUR 5 million to make sure they meet requirements for monitoring and evaluating results. **Sweden**, and others, uses a logical framework and defines SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound) objectives when planning its programmes, including defining outcome, output and process indicators. Another option is yearly reporting on the quality of programmes "at entry" to help operations managers improve oversight of programme design (see Box 2).

Box 2: The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) scales up evaluability

Evaluability is the extent to which an activity or a programme can be evaluated in a reliable and credible fashion. Evaluability requires that an activity has clearly defined objectives and results that can be verified. The IDB's evaluation office recommended in 2005 that evaluation standards be introduced as a criterion for project approval; this was adopted and included in the IDB's mandate in 2010. The Bank is currently implementing this mandate; and the Office of Evaluation and Oversight has been instructed to perform evaluability assessments on a yearly basis.

Source: IDB Office of Evaluation and Oversight (2010)

Lesson 6: Ask the right questions and be realistic about expected results

WHAT: It is important that decision-makers and programme managers have realistic expectations about what types of questions evaluation can help answer. While evaluation is a useful input, evaluation alone cannot solve all problems of learning and accountability faced by a development agency. Further, not everything needs to be evaluated all the time. Evaluation topics should be selected based on a clearly identified need and link to the agency's overall strategic management.

WHY: DAC members are increasingly pursuing more complex, longer term objectives in partnership with many other actors. Individual donor activities can rarely be linked to results in a simple way. And yet, development agencies are also under tremendous pressure to demonstrate the results of official development assistance. Many are trying hard to report progress on high level results and to link outcomes (such as declining maternal mortality or improving employment rates) to specific activities they finance or have supported. There is widespread insistence on seeing tangible results and for making "every dollar count". Sometimes this creates unrealistic expectations for evaluators.

Evaluation units are increasingly asked to assess high level impacts (such as changes in infant mortality) in unrealistically short time frames, with insufficient resources. Too often this results in reporting on outcomes and impacts that are only loosely, if at all, linked to the actual activities of donors. In the worst case, this kind of results reporting ignores the broader context for development, including the role of the host government, the private sector or civil society groups, as if the donor were working in a vacuum.

HOW: Decision makers should engage regularly with evaluation and related research and performance management data, for example by becoming familiar with the evaluation work plan or meeting with the head of evaluation to discuss strategic objectives and organisational priorities. Senior management should work towards developing clear policies and strategies for reporting credible results at the aggregate level – again working with the evaluation department to ensure that evaluations can help contribute to overall results reporting. Donors should collaborate with partner countries to understand the contributions of various factors to achieving development outcomes at country-level. They might then choose to focus their own evaluation efforts on understanding how they are contributing in the context of these broader development processes. The evaluation unit can work with management and staff during programme design and throughout programme implementation to help colleagues understand what they can expect from evaluations and what methods can produce credible information on results. Expectations should be matched with adequate resources (Lesson 4).

Managers of development programmes should work closely with the evaluation unit to identify strategic questions of interest and set out a research agenda to address them. Evaluation units should prioritise and be selective, choosing themes, sectors and policy issues of high importance and focusing on evaluation topics with the most learning potential. One way to focus evaluation efforts is by identifying where the greatest risks to the agency or Ministry lie, and focusing evaluation efforts in high risk areas, for instance large, high cost programmes, or new, innovative programmes about which there is little information. Another approach is to start from the basis of what information is needed for programme or policy reforms (Lesson 1) and to derive evaluation topics from those needs.

DAC member experiences

Most evaluation departments, including **Norway** and **Austria**, consult extensively with staff and managers when deciding on their evaluation programme. This helps to ensure that evaluations cover relevant topics of interest. **Germany**, the **European Union,** the **World Bank Group** and others have recently carried out evaluation work looking at their development co-operation efforts in settings of conflict and fragility, responding to specific requests from policy makers or an identified "evidence gap" in this field. In **Finland**, the **African Development Bank** and **Sweden**, senior decision makers have commissioned evaluation work (including evaluability studies, reviews of existing evidence and policy-level evaluations) to help the development co-operation programme better implement strategic priorities on gender mainstreaming, governance and human rights. In 2008, in the context of rising prices of staple food products and growing debates on the best ways to respond to food insecurity, **France** initiated an evaluation of its food aid policy and food aid instruments to inform reform efforts.

Lesson 7: Choose the right evaluation tools

WHAT: Evaluations should use suitable research and statistical analysis methods to answer the evaluation questions and assess the development activity in terms of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. Various evaluation methods and approaches exist. The purpose (objective) and scope of an evaluation − what it aims to find out − will determine which tool is most appropriate. Some of the different types of evaluations include: *ex-ante*, *ex-post*, mid-term, meta-, and participatory evaluation.

WHY: There is no single best method for evaluating all development interventions. Experience shows that evaluations are most likely to be useful to those using them when the methodology fits the questions (what we want to find out), the context and the programme being evaluated. The DAC *Quality Standards for Development Evaluation* (OECD, 2011a) emphasise the importance of flexibility in selecting an evaluation approach that is best suited to each particular evaluation. Such "best fit" methods are most likely to produce useful, relevant, credible evidence. An overly rigid approach can stifle critical thinking.

HOW: Most members of the OECD DAC have an evaluation guide or manual which outlines a range of evaluation tools and methods that can be used, offering a menu of options. There may be trade-offs between different objectives for an evaluation. Potential users should therefore be consulted to ensure that the methods chosen will produce the type of information that will meet their needs. Donors are leading various initiatives to improve evaluation methods and approaches.

DAC member experiences

Germany carried out a study reviewing approaches to evaluating efficiency in 2011, providing a toolkit of different approaches. The **European Commission** led work to develop an evaluation methodology to analyse how general and sector budget support affects development outcomes at the country level. The approach was piloted with Tunisia, Zambia and Mali and is now being used to evaluate budget support activities in other countries. The **Network of Networks on Impact Evaluation** guidance on *Impact Evaluations and Development* (NONIE, 2009) outlines key conceptual and methodological issues around assessing development impacts and can be a useful resource. In an effort to strengthen the evidence base and evaluation methods, many DAC members and other governments support the **International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3iE)** which funds impact evaluations and reviews. The **World Bank Group** works to carry out and support research evaluating the impact of programs to alleviate poverty through its multi-donor Strategic Impact Evaluation Fund.

Box 3: Improving evaluation approaches in settings of conflict and fragility

Recognising the need for better, tailored approaches to learning and accountability in settings of violent conflict and state fragility, the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) launched an initiative to develop evaluation guidance in 2006. The DAC Network on Development Evaluation and the DAC International Network on Conflict & Fragility joined forces to take this work forward. The resulting guidance, *Evaluating Peacebuilding Activities in Settings of Conflict and Fragility: Improving Learning for Results* (OECD, 2012) aims to improve performance in these complex settings by supporting evaluation and learning. It provides step-by-step guidance to evaluation and basic principles for selecting an effective evaluation methodology that is suited to these challenging settings. It draws on real world experience and an extensive testing phase, including evaluations in Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The new guidance supports the broader community of donors, country partners and implementing organisations to enhance the quality of conflict prevention and peacebuilding interventions.

Source: Kennedy-Chouane (2011)

Lesson 8: Work together

WHAT: Evaluations should involve country stakeholders, governments, other providers of development assistance, beneficiaries and non-state actors, as suited to the evaluation topic at hand. Evaluations can be carried out jointly, involving other partners in the management or steering group. Other ways of collaborating include sharing data, reports or context analyses, commissioning syntheses of evaluation findings, meta-evaluations and peer reviews, and developing common definitions and methodologies.

WHY: The Paris, Accra and Busan commitments to make aid more effective include the obligation to co-ordinate and work more closely with partner countries in evaluation. DAC members have committed to harmonise their evaluation approaches and to work through national evaluation systems (Lesson 9). As development co-operation has moved more towards joint strategies and collective financing of country-led development initiatives, evaluations must follow suit.

OECD DAC norms and standards also set the precedent that joint evaluation should be the default option when joint funding is provided and systematically considered as a first option for other types of assistance. It is hoped that, over time, increasing collaboration will reduce the burden of multiple, unco-ordinated evaluations and field visits and lower transaction costs – particularly the burden on partners. Collaboration is also essential to learn from each other and is particularly valuable for understanding high level development results because such evaluations tend to have a broader scope. Furthermore, in situations of high political risk or violent conflict, joint work can shield individual governments from political backlash and may be viewed as more credible than a single donor evaluation.

Evaluation can be a useful entry point for working with partners because it provides an opportunity to discuss and build consensus on strategic objectives, as well as to analyse critically the approach to development co-operation and assess shared results. Collaboration in planning and carrying out evaluations can create a basis for mutual accountability. Collecting evidence from intended beneficiaries and local partners can also help ensure the evaluation analysis accurately reflects realities on the ground.

HOW: Documents initiating a development co-operation partnership (e.g. joint assistance strategies or memorandums of agreement) should include plans for joint evaluation. Another useful way to create incentives for doing evaluations jointly is making it a requirement in the evaluation policy. Half of all DAC member agencies' evaluation policies now explicitly provide a mandate for evaluating jointly with others (OECD, 2010a).

The DAC Network on Development Evaluation has a public database where members can share evaluation plans, and network meetings often feature an informal exchange of ideas for topics for joint evaluation. The DAC's *Guidance on Managing Joint Evaluation* (OECD, 2006) provides practical advice for managers. For instance, in large joint evaluations, a reference or steering group can bring together various partners to reach agreement on key questions and approaches, while delegating tasks in a manageable way. Where co-ordination is difficult, evaluation managers may opt to have one agency (or a Ministry in the partner government) lead, while others contribute as silent partners.

DAC MEMBER EXPERIENCES

Japan and **New Zealand** carry out most project evaluations jointly with partner governments. **Sweden** has led or participated in many joint evaluations, including a 2011 review of anti-corruption efforts, and also carried out a review of ways to increase joint programming (SADEV, 2008). In 2010, **Belgium** directed a broad coalition of bilateral and multilateral donors, and government partners in reviewing support to peacebuilding in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. The **United Kingdom** supports a major research initiative to produce systematic reviews on key development questions as a service to the development community. Following the earthquake in Haiti in 2010, a group of international partners, led by **Ireland,** the **European Commission** and the **United Kingdom** commissioned a shared context analysis (which could be reused for different evaluations) and funded an evaluation support office in Port-au-Prince to support collaboration, capacity development and co-ordination of field visits.

Box 4. Joint evaluation of support to peacebuilding in Southern Sudan

In 2010, a major joint evaluation of peacebuilding efforts in Southern Sudan brought together a large number of development partners (including most major donors) along with representatives of what would soon be the independent Government of South Sudan. A reference group in Southern Sudan was established and chaired by the transitional Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning to oversee and interact with the evaluation team during the evaluation. This group also involved representatives of government institutions, donors and agencies, the United Nations, the Joint Donor Team, and the NGO Forum Secretariat.

The evaluation concluded that support to conflict prevention and peacebuilding had been partially successful but has largely "missed the mark". Donor strategies did not fully incorporate key drivers of violence, which resulted in an overemphasis on basic services and a relative neglect of security, policing and the rule of law, all essential to state formation. Assistance in preparing Southern Sudan for secession was insufficient. There was an over-use of so-called "good practice" – particularly with respect to ownership and harmonisation – at the expense of much needed in-depth knowledge and analysis of the changing conflict context. The evaluation helped change the way donors are supporting South Sudan after independence.

Source: Bennett *et al.* (2010)

Lesson 9: Help strengthen partner country capacities and use them

WHAT: Donors should support developing country partners in strengthening their own systems for results management and evaluation, as agreed in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and reiterated in the Accra Agenda for Action and the Busan Partnership. Capacities are required at the individual level and within institutions to supply and demand quality evaluation (DAC Evaluation Network, 2009). Capacity development involves creating an environment of openness and accountability in a context of democratic governance with transparency in policy making and expenditure management. For more on capacity development, see also in this series: *Supporting Partners to Development their Capacity – 12 Lessons from DAC Peer Reviews* (OECD, 2012).

WHY: National capacities to produce and use evaluative evidence are required not just to ensure aid funds are well spent, but also to help make public institutions and policies in developing countries more effective at reducing poverty and stimulating economic growth. Evaluation of public policies is a valuable tool for domestic accountability, as well as supporting mutual accountability between development partners.

The commitment to support and use partner country capacities is well established in the DAC and was furthered by the agreements to improve aid effectiveness made in Paris, Accra and Busan. These commitments apply specifically to donor's work to strengthen and use evaluation capacities (see paragraphs 45 and 46 in the Paris Declaration and paragraph 15 in the Accra Agenda for Action). One reason for this commitment is that evaluating progress towards development goals requires looking not just at aid, but also at the policies and programmes of the partner country.

HOW: Capacity development is necessarily an endogenous process, and must therefore be owned and led by partner countries themselves. However, donors should take action to ensure that they do not undermine capacities, that they support capacity development where possible and that they use and reinforce existing capacities. The DAC's tip sheet, "How to Support Capacity Development through Evaluation" (OECD, 2010b) provides advice to donors on how to work in ways that support partners – for instance by timing evaluations to fit national policy cycles. The timing of an evaluation and selection of its focus and scope will have a critical impact on how useful the evaluation will be for partner country stakeholders, and how readily the process might lend itself to capacity development. Involving partners in evaluations is one way to help strengthen their interest in evaluation, while building individual and institutional capacities. Achieving learning-by-doing requires that learning is an explicit objective of the evaluation process and that time and resources are set aside for capacity development.

DAC member experiences

Donors can support partner countries through programmes such as the regional **Centres for Learning on Evaluation and Results (CLEAR) Initiative**, which works through existing research centres in developing countries to support national capacity development, **EvalPartners,** which works with civil society, or the **International Organisation for Cooperation in Evaluation,** a network of national evaluation groups. **Canada's** CIDA partnered with the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC) to strengthen the monitoring and evaluation units managing Poverty Reduction Strategies in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Senegal and Benin and has also been supporting the regional Middle East North Africa Evaluation Association (EvalMENA). **Australia** and **Vietnam** have worked together to integrate evaluation and capacity strengthening in the Government's planning and investment ministry. **Germany** and **Costa Rica** are working to support capacity development in the national administration. The **DAC Network on Development Evaluation's** task team on capacity development, led by **Finland**, works to improve co-ordination, share experiences and increase the evidence base for capacity support. Several donors have provided long-term support on evaluation to the Government of **Uganda,** which launched the Uganda Government Evaluation Facility in March 2013. The **Netherlands, Australia** and other partners are funding "Better Evaluation," an open source web-based platform that assists evaluation practitioners in both developed and developing countries.

Box 5. Japan supports capacity development

The Evaluation Department of **JICA**, in collaboration with partner country Ministries of Planning (or equivalent organisation), jointly plans and supervises the capacity development process. JICA agreed to support evaluation capacity development in **Vietnam, Philippines**, and **Indonesia** by signing memoranda of understanding for co-operation in evaluation. JICA aims to help partner countries build capacities to manage projects effectively and to use lessons and recommendations from evaluations in future development projects. Furthermore, since 2001, JICA's Evaluation Department conducts annual ODA evaluation seminars for developing country partners. Concurrently, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs holds annual workshops on ODA evaluation with the participation of government officials and academic experts of partner countries in the Asia Pacific region. These workshops have led to further development of evaluation capacities – not only of government officials but also of evaluation experts in the region.

Source: OECD (2010a)

STRENGTHENING THE CULTURE OF LEARNING

Lesson 10: Act on evaluation findings

WHAT: Evaluation findings should influence the decisions and actions of development policy makers and senior managers. To achieve this, procedures should be put in place to ensure that appropriate and timely actions are taken by those responsible for strategic planning, programme design and oversight. Usually this involves a formal management response system, which requires senior officials or programme managers to respond to each evaluation finding and recommendation. More informal feedback loops are also used to help managers learn about and use evaluation findings. Reporting on and monitoring the implementation of management responses is crucial to guarantee follow-up and highlight useful changes that have been made as a result of evaluation (see Lesson 12).

WHY: Management response systems ensure that the concerned actors (programme managers, country desks, thematic leads, programme staff, senior management, line ministries, country partners, Parliamentary committees) are aware of relevant findings and take action to correct or improve future programmes accordingly. Such responses to evaluation are also part of encouraging an organisation-wide routine of learning (Lesson 2) and for encouraging all staff to engage with evaluation. A solid feedback system can help ensure that learning from evaluation is considered at the design phase of future programmes to prevent mistakes from being repeated. Requiring systematic evaluation feedback and response also helps avoid the selective repression of poor results and ensures transparency.

HOW: Development policy processes are complex and driven by many factors besides evaluative evidence. As a result, increasing uptake of evaluation findings is no simple task. Literature on the uptake of research findings points to several key factors that can strengthen uptake: a clear focus on priority policy issues (Lesson 6), building relationships between evaluators and decision makers, and investment in pro-active communication and knowledge sharing. The evaluation unit also needs to have the capacity to respond in a timely way to windows of opportunity that could allow it to publicize its knowledge, such as the visit of the Minister to a particular country or media interest around an international policy forum on a particular development topic.

The use of evaluation to influence policy depends on both evaluators and policy makers. The opportunity to identify lessons and act on evidence must be embedded into the overall design and management of development co-operation activities. Institutional mechanisms for follow up on evaluation findings are also required to ensure adequate response and follow-up action from management. About two thirds of DAC members have a mechanism to ensure management responds to and follows up on evaluation findings. The degree of formality of management responses varies substantially. Nevertheless most mechanisms consist of a written, formal response from the programme concerned and agreement on follow-up action based on the recommendations. Some agencies publish management responses with evaluation reports, to ensure that actions are taken. Another useful way to link with management is having the head of evaluation participate in senior management meetings.

DAC member experiences

In **Portugal,** the evaluation unit works with programme staff to discuss recommendations from evaluations and a management response identifies follow-up actions. One year later the evaluation staff assesses the level of implementation and publishes the results in an annual report. **Switzerland's SECO** has placed the Evaluation Officer in the Department of Economic Co-operation and Development to ensure a close collaboration with divisions and management and to facilitate integration of evaluation findings into daily work. In **Japan**, the Evaluation Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs consults with responsible divisions in the Ministry and JICA to decide on responses to recommendations by third-party evaluators within three months, follows up the implementation of these response measures one year after the decision, and publishes the results in annual reports. At the **Asian Development Bank's** Independent Evaluation Department, an online Management Action Record System is used to review and track actions taken and official management responses are made available to the public online.

Box 6: Norway's management response and tracking system

Norway provides a good example of one of the more developed management response systems. Within six weeks of an evaluation report being completed, an official response from the Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is submitted to the relevant programme area, the Norad Director-General and the Evaluation Department. This response outlines what actions are to be taken. One year later, the programme responsible responds to the Secretary General describing what has been done in response to the evaluation. The Evaluation Department is responsible for overseeing this reporting process to ensure agreed actions are taken.

Source: OECD (2010a)

Lesson 11: Communicate evaluation results effectively

WHAT: To achieve the desired goals of evaluation, the findings and conclusions need to be communicated effectively. Effective communication involves delivering messages and presenting evidence in a clear, easily understood way that is immediately accessible to stakeholders.

WHY: Development organisations need to put adequate attention and resources into communicating – otherwise the effort of evaluating will be wasted when the final report goes unnoticed and unused. Good communication supports learning (Lesson 2) and the use of evaluation findings (Lesson 10). Communication is also indispensable to being transparent about results. Evaluation can bring hard evidence and a credible, independent voice to public education campaigns on development. Also, by demonstrating that the agency is candid about what it is achieving with tax payers' money, good communication based on evaluation evidence can reinforce the credibility of the development co-operation programme as a whole and increase public awareness about development.

HOW: The agency's evaluation policy should make communicating evaluation findings a top priority. When an evaluation is being planned, a dissemination and communication plan should also be developed. Different types of evaluations will aim to reach different audiences, requiring a targeted approach to communicate the results to the right people. Stakeholders have diverse information needs and are more comfortable using different media – this should be taken into account when planning communication. Development programme staff and management are primarily interested in information about how they can improve their own work. Political leaders may be more interested in the overall results of development efforts and any reputational risks identified in the evaluation findings. Advocacy NGOs, beneficiaries and partners will want to see how the donor is performing against its commitments and what results have been achieved. Evaluation managers should plan ahead by thinking about potential audiences' needs and interests early on.

It can be helpful to create institutional links between communication and evaluation units to facilitate sharing of information. Communication units should draw inputs from evaluation when producing annual reports or other products used to raise public awareness. Evaluation units, in turn, can draw on the expertise of communication professionals to get their messages across effectively.

Other useful strategies for improving the communication of evaluation findings include:

- Producing a variety of summaries focusing on different parts of the evaluation that are of interest to particular audiences – for instance, a summary of findings on women's empowerment for colleagues working on gender equality, or a short recap of lessons on implementation for programme managers. Grouping several evaluations on a particular theme or country and holding a workshop to discuss lessons and draw broader conclusions, can also be effective.

- Disseminating evaluation reports widely to staff and management through internal email and intranet systems, formal and informal workshops and briefings, or holding brown bag lunches or after work drinks events to discuss findings. Web-based conferencing technology can also be used to discuss the findings of evaluation reports with the country office involved and other neighbouring or interested country offices.

- Holding press conferences and public debates to launch evaluations, and using social media, video clips, podcasts, websites and email to build up networks of interested people and share reports in a timely way.

- Systematically sharing findings with the intended beneficiaries of development assistance and with media and civil society in developing countries. This requires building up networks of contacts and planning ahead to reach relevant partner audiences effectively, as well as translating the evaluation into local languages.

DAC member experiences

Many different communication tools have been used by DAC members**.** In **Korea,** the Evaluation Office in KOICA holds a briefing session upon completion of a report, during which evaluators explain main findings to KOICA staff and the public. The **Asian Development Bank** produces short, medium and long syntheses and policy lesson notes for each evaluation, tailoring each product to a particular audience. Evaluation or communication units in **Norway, Belgium, the Netherlands**, and the **World Bank Group's Independent Evaluation Group** use Twitter to inform current development debates with evaluation findings. **Japan** produces an annual evaluation report synthesizing lessons from evaluations over the past year. **Luxembourg** uses bi-monthly meetings to communicate evaluation findings to NGO representatives and Ministry staff. In **France**, the evaluation budget covers dissemination activities, including meeting or conference organisation and publication of different knowledge products (syntheses, stocktaking reports, briefs, etc.). **Australia** has a communication product menu, each with an example, for internal use, which encourages evaluation staff to think creatively about formal and informal means of disseminating their work. **The Netherlands, Denmark** and **France** have tried using filmed evaluations to present a captivating story of the evaluation. The major international joint **Evaluation of the Implementation of the Paris Declaration** was disseminated using thematic and country videos posted on YouTube, in addition to written reports and policy briefs.

**Box 7: Evaluation inputs to the celebration of 50th Anniversary of Denmark's
official development co-operation**

In 2012, **Denmark's** official development co-operation celebrated its 50th anniversary. Information booths (experience circles) were displayed at shopping malls in various locations (including shopping malls) in Denmark to provide the general public with an experiential look at the results of Danish development co-operation in different countries and sectors. The Evaluation Department worked closely with colleagues in communications to feed stories and facts from evaluations into the exhibit, into the campaign called "Better Framework Conditions" and into Danida's flagship report for the anniversary, which included a discussion of how evaluation influenced the course of Danish aid over the years, and a thoughtful look at the challenges around assessing results. Experience from the involvement in the communication work highlighted in particular the need for evaluation work to focus more on results "on the ground" to generate a better foundation for communicating with a broad public. Evaluations with a primary focus on institutional aspects of development co-operation – crucial for decision-makers and managers - may be more difficult to use in communication to the broader public. However, we also need to find ways to convey stories from this field in order to tell the story about modern development co-operation, which often works through sector ministries in partner countries rather than through specific projects funded by individual donors.

Source: Denmark (2012) and Andersen (2012)

Lesson 12: Evaluate the evaluators

WHAT: A quality evaluation is one that is credible, valid, accurate, understandable and useful. These characteristics are mutually reinforcing. Development agencies should check that evaluation is achieving its aims and having a real impact on policy and practice to improve development outcomes. This involves checking the quality of individual evaluation reports and reviewing periodically the evaluation function as a whole to assess its contribution to making development co-operation more effective.

WHY: Evaluations that use appropriate rigour are more likely to be trusted and used (Lesson 7). Robustness also helps increase the external validity of findings − meaning one can draw broader conclusions from individual studies and contribute to collective knowledge about how development works. Simply put, a low quality evaluation will not be useful. Poor evidence, flawed analysis or the wrong advice can even do more harm than good.

HOW: The DAC *Quality Standards for Development Evaluation* (OECD, 2010) describes the basic characteristics of a quality process and report. Evaluation reports should provide a transparent description of the methodological approach, assumptions made, data gaps and any weaknesses in the report to allow the reader to make an informed judgement of its quality. Systematic quality checks are often put in place to review terms of references, draft reports and final reports against the DAC standards.

Some ideas for how to ensure good quality evaluation include:

- Check lists and peer reviews of quality
- Independent assessment by an evaluation expert
- Periodic meta-evaluations or systematic reviews to look at the overall quality of evidence on a particular topic and to identify where more work is needed
- Training staff, including sending staff to external training, involvement as observers in and evaluation carried out by a more experienced evaluation unit or secondment to another donor
- Providing training for evaluation consultants
- Performance review for evaluation consultants (and quality clauses in consultant contracts)
- Investing time in checking terms of references (because bad reports are often the result of a poorly designed evaluation or unclear or overly ambitious terms of reference)

Peer reviews or independent assessments can be useful ways to understand whether the evaluation system as a whole is fulfilling its intended purpose. A peer review of the evaluation function, using the DAC Evaluation Network's assessment tool (OECD, 2006, reproduced in Annex A) can shed light on how the system is working overall.

In addition to tracking the dissemination of reports, mechanisms should be put in place to monitor how evaluation findings are used, for example by tracking references to evaluation findings in the media, key policy documents or strategy papers, to build up data on the reach and influence of evaluation.

DAC member experiences

Sweden's SIDA has developed a check list for tracking the quality of completed evaluation reports. The **African Development Bank** Operations Evaluation Department subjects reports to internal and external peer reviews to check quality. An independent assessment of the evaluation process and outcome can also be commissioned for major evaluations, as was done for the joint **Evaluation of the Paris Declaration,** to determine whether the evaluation meets accepted standards of quality and to identify strengths, weaknesses, and lessons. **Canada** uses a performance review process for evaluation consultants regularly involved in conducting studies to ensure their work meets standards.

In 2010, in connection with an examination of Danish development assistance to Tanzania, the National Audit Office of **Denmark** examined the development co-operation programme's evaluation practice and use of evaluations. The Secretariat of the Treasury Board of **Canada** undertakes an annual review of the performance of the Evaluation Directorate based on the quality of the work performed, neutrality, coverage, and usage of products. **Belgium** underwent such a review in 2009, during which evaluation experts from the Netherlands, Spain and Canada provided analysis and detailed recommendations. **Sweden, Germany, Korea** and the **United Kingdom** have all commissioned independent reviews or meta-evaluations by international evaluation experts.

Australia's Office of Development Effectiveness has institutionalised an impact log, where members of the evaluation unit track citations of reports (including informal references) to get a better sense of their overall impact.

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> 2013 (in progress): Australia, Norway, Sweden
>
> 2012: Canada, European Union, Finland, Korea, Luxembourg
>
> 2011: Denmark, Greece, Netherlands, Spain, United States of America
>
> 2010: Belgium, Germany, Japan, New Zealand, Portugal, United Kingdom
>
> 2009: Austria, Italy, Ireland, Sweden, Switzerland

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Useful web resources

- **OECD DAC Network on Development Evaluation:** www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation
  Contains information on the evaluation work of the OECD DAC, summaries of evaluation findings in key policy areas, links to numerous evaluation resources and an overview of the DAC's key norms and standards for development evaluation.
- **DAC Evaluation Resource Centre (DEReC)**: www.oecd.org/derec
  A library of evaluation reports and other resources from the members of the DAC Network on Development evaluation.
- **Better Evaluation**: http://betterevaluation.org/
  An international collaboration to improve evaluation practice and theory by sharing information about options (methods or tools) and approaches.
- **My Monitoring & Evaluation:** http://mymande.org/. An interactive Web 2.0 platform to share knowledge on country-led M&E systems worldwide.
- **CLEAR Regional Centres for Learning on Evaluation and Results:** www.theclearinitiative.org
  Resources for strengthening the monitoring and evaluation and performance management capacity of countries and their governments to achieve development outcomes.
- **International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3IE):** www.3ieimpact.org
  Resources on impact evaluations and systematic reviews that generate high quality evidence on what works in development and why.

Annex A: Evaluation systems and use: a working tool for peer reviews and assessments

"Evaluation Systems and Use: A working tool for peer reviews and assessments" (OECD, 2006), is also available in *Evaluating Development Co-operation: Summary of Key Norms and Standards*, 2nd edition (OECD, 2011a). It has been reprinted here for ease of reference, and as useful background reading for the 12 lessons.

This framework was developed on the basis of a thorough analysis of DAC peer reviews conducted over a period of eight years. The tool draws on key norms and standards and was designed to strengthen the evaluation function and promote transparency and accountability in development agencies. It has been developed with peer reviews in mind and as a management device for improving evaluation practice in aid agencies. It is a "living" tool, meant to be updated in function of experience.

1. Evaluation policy: role, responsibility and objectives of the evaluation unit

- Does the ministry/aid agency have an evaluation policy?
- Does the policy describe the role, governance structure and position of the evaluation unit within the institutional aid structure?
- Does the evaluation function provide a useful coverage of the whole development co-operation programme?
- According to the policy, how does evaluation contribute to institutional learning and accountability?
- How is the relationship between evaluation and audit conceptualised within the agency?
- In countries with two or more aid agencies, how are the roles of the respective evaluation units defined and co-ordinated?

Is the evaluation policy adequately known and implemented within the aid agency?

2. Impartiality, transparency and independence

- To what extent are the evaluation unit and the evaluation process independent from line management?
- What are the formal and actual drivers ensuring/constraining the evaluation unit's independence?
- What is the evaluation unit's experience in exposing success and failures of aid programmes and their implementation?
- Is the evaluation process transparent enough to ensure its credibility and legitimacy? Are evaluation findings consistently made public?
- How does the aid agency/ministry promote follow up on findings from relevant stakeholders (through e.g. steering groups, advisory panels, and sounding boards)?
- Are links with decision making processes ensured to promote the use of evaluation in policy formulation?
- Are there recent examples of major operation and policy changes sparked by evaluation findings and recommendations?
- Are there examples of how evaluation serves as an accountability mechanism?

What are the perceptions of non-evaluation actors (operation and policy departments, field offices, etc.) regarding the usefulness and influence of evaluation?

3. Resources and staff

- Is evaluation supported by appropriate financial and staff resources?
- Does the evaluation unit have a dedicated budget? Is it annual or multi-year? Does the budget cover activities aimed at promoting feedback and use of evaluation and management of evaluation knowledge?
- Do staff have specific expertise in evaluation, and if not, are training programmes available?
- Is there a policy on recruiting consultants, in terms of qualification, impartiality and deontology?

4. Evaluation partnerships and capacity building

- To what extent are beneficiaries involved in the evaluation process?
- To what extent does the agency rely on local evaluators or, when not possible, on third party evaluators from partner countries?
- Does the agency engage in partner-led evaluations?
- Does the unit support training and capacity building programmes in partner countries?

How do partners/beneficiaries/local NGOs perceive the evaluation processes and products promoted by the agency/country examined in terms of quality, independence, objectivity, usefulness and partnership orientation?

5. Quality

- How does the evaluation unit ensure the quality of evaluation (including reports and process)?
- Does the agency have guidelines for the conduct of evaluation, and are these used by relevant stakeholders?
- Has the agency developed/adopted standards/benchmarks to assess and improve the quality of its evaluation reports?

How is the quality of evaluation products/processes perceived throughout the agency?

6. Planning, co-ordination and harmonisation

- Does the agency have a multi-year evaluation plan, describing future evaluations according to a defined timetable?
- How is the evaluation plan developed? Who, within the aid agency, identifies the priorities and how?
- In DAC members where ODA responsibility is shared among two or more agencies, how is the evaluation function organised?
- Does the evaluation unit coordinate its evaluation activities with other donors?
- How are field level evaluation activities co-ordinated? Is authority for evaluation centralised or decentralised?
- Does the evaluation unit engage in joint/multi donor evaluations?
- Does the evaluation unit/aid agency make use of evaluative information coming from other donor organisations?

- In what way does the agency assess the effectiveness of its contributions to multilateral organisations? To what extent does it rely on the evaluation systems of multilateral agencies?

7. Dissemination, feedback, knowledge management and learning

- How are evaluation findings disseminated? In addition to reports, are other communication tools used? (Press releases, press conferences, abstracts, annual reports providing a synthesis of findings)?
- What are the mechanisms in place to ensure feedback of evaluation results to policy makers, operational staff and the general public?
- What mechanisms are in place to ensure that knowledge from evaluation is accessible to staff and relevant stakeholders?

Is evaluation considered a 'learning tool' by agency staff?

8. Evaluation use

- Who are the main users of evaluations within and outside the aid agency?
- Does evaluation respond to the information needs expressed by parliament, audit office, government, and the public?
- Are there systems in place to ensure the follow up and implementation of evaluation findings and recommendations?
- How does the aid agency/ministry promote follow up on findings from relevant stakeholders (through e.g. steering groups, advisory panels, and sounding boards)?
- Are links with decision making processes ensured to promote the use of evaluation in policy formulation?
- Are there recent examples of major operation and policy changes sparked by evaluation findings and recommendations?
- Are there examples of how evaluation serves as an accountability mechanism?

What are the perceptions of non-evaluation actors (operation and policy departments, field offices, etc.) regarding the usefulness and influence of evaluation?

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